

## Tasty custards - a perfect twist to the cheese and cracker platter



Roasted Shallot & Jalapeno Custards

Photo Susie Iventosch

### By Susie Iventosch

We were served these tasty garlic custards at a friend's house, and for all the world they looked like a little round of Boursin cheese to me, as they sat on the serving plate amongst the endive leaves and crackers. I was so surprised when I dug into the custard and spread it on my cracker, because it had such a beautiful soft texture. And then there was the taste! It is such a lovely subtle flavor and much lighter than cheese. What a great idea, I thought. Of course, as I do, I

went home and took a stab at making them for my next dinner guests, opting to use roasted shallots and finely minced jalapeno in place of the garlic, along with a bit of grated Parmesan cheese. These are so much fun and an unusual twist on the cheese and cracker platter. You can use roasted garlic, roasted shallots or even roasted red onions for different flavor profiles in the custards. Top them with a simple vinaigrette, some diced garden-fresh tomatoes and toasted pine nuts.

### Roasted Shallot & Jalapeno Custards

(Makes five 3-inch custards)

#### INGREDIENTS

2 shallots, peeled and cut into quarters  
1 clove garlic, peeled and sliced  
1 tablespoon olive oil  
1 jalapeno, seeded and very finely diced  
1 cup heavy cream  
1 whole egg  
2 egg yolks  
1/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan  
1/4 teaspoon salt  
1/4 teaspoon white pepper  
Vinaigrette (recipe below)  
Garnishes: diced garden fresh tomatoes, basil leaves, toasted pine nuts

#### DIRECTIONS

##### For Shallots:

Preheat oven to 300 F. Place shallots and garlic in a piece of foil, sprinkle with a pinch of salt and white pepper. Wrap tightly and bake for about 25-30 minutes, or until shallots and garlic are cooked through and just beginning to brown. Remove from oven and cool. When cool, process shallots and garlic until smooth.

##### For Custards:

Meanwhile, grease five 6-ounce ramekins (3.5 inch in diameter) with butter and then spray with PAM. Set in a 9x13 casserole dish or baking pan with at least 2-inch high sides. Either keep oven at 300 F or preheat again, if you decided to prepare the shallot/garlic mixture ahead of time

Place all ingredients, including pureed shallots and garlic, in a mixing bowl and whisk until well-blended. Pour custard into prepared ramekins in the 9x13 pan. Very carefully pour water into the pan until it reaches halfway up the sides of the ramekins, being very careful not to splash any water into the custards. With steady hands, place casserole dish in oven and bake for about 45-50 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Allow custards to sit for 10 minutes or so, before inverting them onto the serving plate. (They may need a little cajoling to get out by running a knife around the edges of the ramekin or a solid slap with your hand to the bottom of the ramekin)

Garnish custards with chopped tomatoes, pine nuts and a basil sprig. Drizzle vinaigrette over the top. Serve with sliced baguette, crackers or endive leaves.

#### Simple Vinaigrette

Whisk together:

1/2 teaspoon Dijon mustard  
2 tablespoons red or white wine vinegar  
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil  
1/4 teaspoon thyme  
1/4 teaspoon sea salt  
1/4 teaspoon white pepper

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## Bach Shorts, a multidimensional artistic experience



Image provided

### By Sophie Braccini

Pamela Freund-Striplen is constantly reinventing what she offers to Lamorinda music enthusiasts, despite the difficult time for artists. The founder of the Gold Coast Chamber Players offers something new and fresh this fall with live online multidimensional cultural experiences around J.S. Bach. For one evening in September, October

and November she gives the GCCP "stage" to three exceptional local cello players with the mandate to create a performance that includes music and reflection around different aspects of the great baroque composer. The first performance on Sept. 13 is called Bach and the Dancing Brain.

Freund-Striplen explains that the reasons she chose Bach are both for the richness of his great cello work, and because

she is, like many, deeply touched by the transcendental humanity of his work. She wondered what experience could be broadcast online, support local musicians, while creating something unique and engaging.

Freund-Striplen had long conversations with three local leading cello players and they decided to create events that intersect music and other specific domains. Partnerships were formed with professors and organizations. Bach and the Dancing Brain, the September event, will be led by cellist Christopher Costanza partnering with Jonathan Berger, Stanford University professor, author and composer. Berger's research at Stanford has focused on the effect of music on the brain. How does the brain respond to music, how does music affect the cognitive process, are some questions Costanza and Berger will discuss after the cellist plays J.S. Bach Suites #2 and #6 for solo cello.

This session, as well as the two following ones, will be

broadcast live from Reve Bistro in Lafayette. Reve is providing the ambiance on that Sunday afternoon while the place is not open to the public. Paul Magu, Reve's chef, is a huge fan of chamber music and opera. He and his wife Laura got to know Freund-Striplen, and have already hosted virtual concerts in the restaurant, as the acoustics work well for live streaming. If music lovers want to add a gustative dimension to the experience, they can pick up a to-go dinner that Sunday at the restaurant and eat it at home. More information for that culinary portion can be found on Reve's website: <https://revebistro.com/>

The Sunday in September will be the first of three happenings offered by GCCP. On Oct. 11, cello player Jennifer Kloetzel is partnering with composer Elena Ruehr, presenting Bach Inspired. Ruehr is an award-winning faculty member at MIT, she has also been a Guggenheim fellow, a fellow at Harvard's Radcliffe Institute and composer-in-

residence with the Boston Modern Orchestra Project. After playing J.S. Bach Cello Suite #1 for solo cello, Kloetzel will play Elena Ruehr's Cricket the Fiddler, a piece inspired by Suite #1. This presentation will be a World Premiere.

Then on Nov. 8, cellist Robert Howard will explore the universal appeal of Bach, in collaboration with cellists from Kenya and Colombia, with Bach Connections. Freund-Striplen explains that the cellist has very gifted students in these countries, young people who go to incredible lengths to be able to play. That evening Howard will tell with them, through music, their life stories and what music brings to them. Howard and his students will play J.S. Bach Cello Suite #4, and select movements from Suites #1, 2, and 3.

Freund-Striplen chose the hour of 4 p.m. to reach people in different locations. Tickets are \$20 for one performance and \$50 for all three. More information at <https://www.gccpmusic.com/>

## Tell me more about UC Santa Barbara

### By Elizabeth LaScala, PhD

Does your idea of the ideal California college experience include sun and surf mixed with serious academic pursuits? UC Santa Barbara might be your school. Located on cliffs directly above the Pacific Ocean, this is one of the few colleges that has its own beach, lagoon, koi pond, and nature preserve—all on one campus! Isla Vista, a short walk or bike ride from campus, is a true college town with many student-oriented restaurants and shops. If you attend UCSB, chances are you will live in Isla Vista at some time during your education. Your place may even have an ocean view. There is no need to bring a car to UCSB. It is far, far easier to travel on campus or into Isla Vista by bike or with your own leg power, than it is to drive.

Going beyond the beach and beauty of the campus, UCSB has more than 90 majors as well as numerous minors and certificate programs, all housed at one of the leading research universities in the country. UCSB's faculty boasts six Nobel laureates, and many faculty members are widely recognized and respected in their fields. UCSB's College of Letters and Sciences is the academic home to 19,000 of the university's 23,000 undergrads. Some of the most popular majors include biopsychology, communication, economics and accounting, global studies and the biological sciences. For the musically inclined, the college offers dozens of instrumental and vocal options leading to the Bachelor of Music degree. UCSB's marine location also make it a great place to study aquatic biology, earth science, geography and hydrology.

Interested in engineering?

UCSB offers accelerated bachelors/masters options in chemical engineering (with materials science), computer science, computer engineering, electrical as well as mechanical engineering. The university's College of Creative Studies (CCS), a small community of 400 undergraduates, functions much like an honors college at other large universities. It helps make a big university feel much smaller and is highly competitive. CCS offers a variety of majors including art, biology, chemistry and biochemistry, computing, mathematics, music composition, physics and writing and literature. CCS students work closely with faculty to choose courses as well as to design and complete their own independent projects. According to the university, 75% of CCS alumni go on to graduate school.

UCSB is not quite as selective as UCLA or UC Berkeley. But

whether you apply as a high school senior or transfer student, it's tough to get in. Over 93,000 students wanted a seat in last year's freshman class; less than 30% were accepted. UCSB also attracted over 24,000 transfer applicants, almost all coming from California community colleges. Just over a fifth got in. Those who get into UCSB tend to stay and graduate. Freshmen retention rates have averaged over 91 percent for every class that has arrived since 2001. At least 70% of every class that has entered since 2007 has graduated in four years. These rates are among the best in the country for a large public university. They're a strong testament to the quality of the students and their love for the school. It also resonates with the perfect slogan this university has adopted for its campus and community: "Where Beauty Meets Brilliance."



Elizabeth LaScala, PhD personally guides each student through each step of selecting and applying to well-matched schools for undergraduate and graduate school study. Over the past two decades, Elizabeth has placed hundreds of students in some of the most prestigious colleges and universities in the U.S. The number of clients taken is limited to ensure each applicant has personalized attention. Contact Elizabeth early in the process to make a difference in your outcomes. Write [elizabeth@doingcollege.com](mailto:elizabeth@doingcollege.com); Visit [www.doingcollege.com](http://www.doingcollege.com); or Call: 925.385.0562.

## A mosaic of experiences: online schooling

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She supervises her children's in-class Zoom calls and daily assignments which takes about three hours of her time a day. She feels she is falling behind at work and worried that her children are not getting a quality education.

Watkins says that his sixth-grader can mostly work independently, it is not the

case for his third-grader. He notes what a difference it makes to have him available at home and he does not know how he would have done it otherwise. He says that his presence is having a positive influence on his son. Watkins knows not to watch over his son's shoulder during the synchronous lessons as he feels that some struggle may be built in the lesson plan in-

tionally by the teacher to increase students' resourcefulness.

Not being overly present in the daily school life of young children is a recommendation shared by David Schrag, Orinda school district director of curriculum and instructions. He would like parents to let go as much as possible and let their children have moments of struggle.

Schrag has seen how much work teachers have put into the creation of a completely new experience for the children. Even the star teachers that have superb mastery of a live classroom may struggle with Zoom breakrooms and keeping children accountable. They work collaboratively by grade level to establish norms and practices to make sure learning happens, on top of

redesigning the curriculum for the new way of delivering it.

Schrag says that most teachers are eager to come back to what they signed up for: live classroom teaching. When that happens is uncertain, but he said that, when it is safe for all, efforts will be made to bring back the younger students and those more in need first.